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Educational Reform:

The Players And The Politics

A Report From The Public Agenda Foundation
Prepared For The Charles F. Kettering Foundation

by
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This study builds on research previously undertaken by Public Agenda on education and the economy. Interested readers may refer to *CrossTalk* for an overview of this work.

The Public Agenda Foundation

Founded a decade ago by public opinion analyst Daniel Yankelovich and former Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, the Public Agenda Foundation works to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues and to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view. Public Agenda's in-depth research on how average citizens think about public policy forms the basis for its extensive citizen education work. Its citizen education materials — used by the National Issues Forums and media outlets across the country — have won praise for their credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decision-makers across the political spectrum.

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Introduction and Overview

Currently, much of the educational reform movement's energy is spent debating the merits and flaws of different policy proposals. But these substantive arguments may be disguising a hidden debate over the process and politics of educational reform: a debate over who should be responsible for educating our youth, what and who is responsible for the current difficulties, and how severe these difficulties are. The goal of this report is to identify the attitudes which drive this last debate.

The report is based on mail surveys conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation, in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation, between January 13 and March 31, 1992. Diverse groups with a stake in education were surveyed using systematic random sampling: in the public school system, K-12 teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board presidents; in the private sector, business executives from major corporations. The analysis is based on 803 returned questionnaires.[1]

Throughout the report, when we refer to *educators* we mean teachers, principals and superintendents. When we refer to *administrators*, we mean only principals and superintendents. School board presidents are treated as a distinct group.[2]

We expected these different groups to have fundamentally disparate views toward education in our nation's schools. This expectation was substantially confirmed — there is a wide gap in attitudes about the schools between business executives and professional educators. Although there is consensus among the groups on the goals of education, there are acute disagreements about almost everything else: rating the schools' achievement on those goals, defining the problems and their severity, and supporting reforms and solutions to those problems.

Agreement On Goals — Disagreement On Performance

About four in five business executives, educators, and school board presidents said it was *essential* that schools teach students seven key elements: the fundamental values of society, sound work habits, self-esteem, grammatically correct English, science and math, to work cooperatively, and to be flexible learners.

But business executives think the schools fail to accomplish many of these key goals. Majorities of business executives think the schools are doing a *poor* job teaching three of the seven essentials (sound work habits, English, and science and math). By contrast, educators assess school performance as fair (or good or excellent) on all seven goals.

Furthermore, about 70 percent of educators are strongly convinced that outside critics of education underestimate the good things happening in the schools (only 13 percent of business executives have a similar reaction). And while overwhelming majorities of educators think the schools in *their own community* are on the right track, a majority of business executives (56%) think their *own community's* schools are on the wrong track.

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[1] Response rates, sampling margins of error, and details about the conduct of the surveys are in the Methodology section at the end of the study.

[2] We had initially defined school board presidents as educators, but in answering the questionnaire the vast majority skipped questions explicitly reserved for educators, and their responses often differ from those of educators. They are therefore treated as a separate group throughout the report.

Money Is/Is Not The Problem

Business executives and educators often diverge in their diagnosis of the schools' problems. Educators are much more likely than executives to say that the schools are overburdened and that money is an important problem. For example, educators are two to three times more likely than executives to say that students from other nations do better than American students because other countries spend more money on education. At least two-thirds of educators (but only 19 percent of executives) say other nations' students fare better because the U.S. tries to educate everyone while other nations channel weaker students into vocational programs. And while over 71 percent of educators say the schools are overburdened with societal problems, only 49 percent of executives think this is a very serious problem.

Although educators think parents are not involved enough in their children's education, only business executives want to increase parental say over substantive school policies. About half of executives want parents to have more say over the allocation of school funds, the curriculum, and the selection of administrators. Only small percentages of educators agree.

Teachers And Executives Support National Standards, Fault Administrative Waste

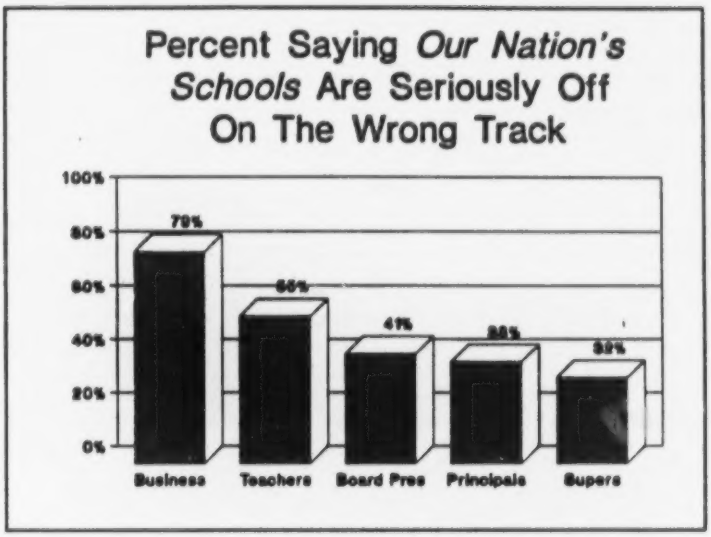
Our findings indicate that it would be a mistake to treat teachers, principals, and superintendents as part of a monolithic group of "professional educators" because they often differ in their views. There are areas where teachers are more likely to take the position of executives. For example, 64 percent of teachers joined the 82 percent of executives calling for common national standards, a measure opposed by other educators. Strong majorities of both executives and teachers (66 percent and 60 percent respectively) think needless waste in administration and bureaucracy is a very serious problem, (compared to 28 percent or less of administrators). But while majorities of teachers think classes are overcrowded and teachers' salaries are too low, only small proportions of principals and superintendents agree (executives join administrators in downplaying these problems).

Thus, there are differences between the views of professional educators and the business community — between those who teach students and those who end up employing them. There are also isolated areas of consensus, and areas where different groups ally. Any attempt to invigorate dialogue and build cooperation between these unique groups must acknowledge and work with those differences.

I. Acknowledging the Problem

Finding

Business executives are much more pessimistic than educators about the direction our nation's schools are headed. Fully 79 percent of business executives say the nation's public schools are pretty seriously off on the wrong track while only 32 percent of superintendents, 38 percent of principals, and 41 percent of school board presidents express such concern. Teachers are somewhat pessimistic, with 55 percent saying we are on the wrong track and 45 percent saying we are headed in the right direction.

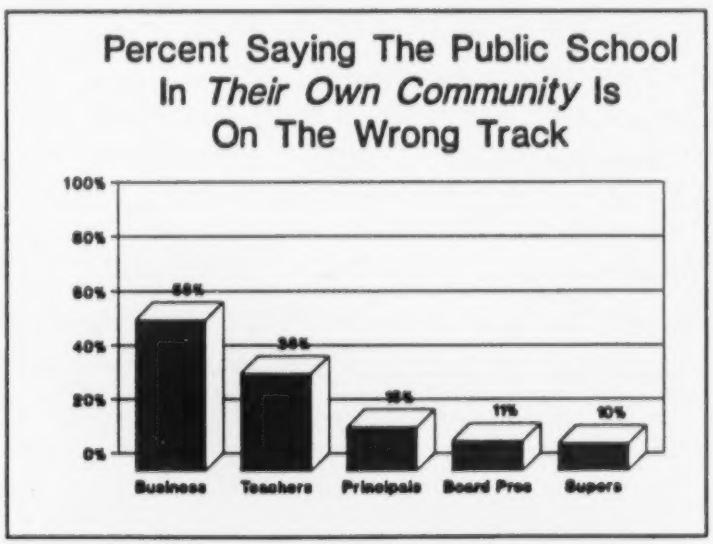


Observation

The increasingly active approach business has been taking toward education seems to reflect the widely-held view among executives that the schools are failing. By contrast, the substantial proportions — and even majorities — of educators who think the schools are moving in the right direction is surprising, given the extensive criticisms leveled at the nation's school system in recent years.

Finding

Educators express even less concern about the direction *their own communities'* schools are headed. Only minimal percentages of administrators (10 percent of superintendents, 16 percent of principals) and school board presidents (11 percent) think their own schools are on the wrong track. Overwhelming majorities (90 percent of superintendents, 89 percent of school board presidents and 84 percent of principals) say their own communities' schools are headed in the right direction. Teachers are optimistic as well, but to a lesser degree (64 percent said their schools were headed in the right direction, 36 percent thought in the wrong direction). However, a *majority* of business executives (56 percent) say *their own communities' schools* are headed in the wrong direction. This despite the fact that



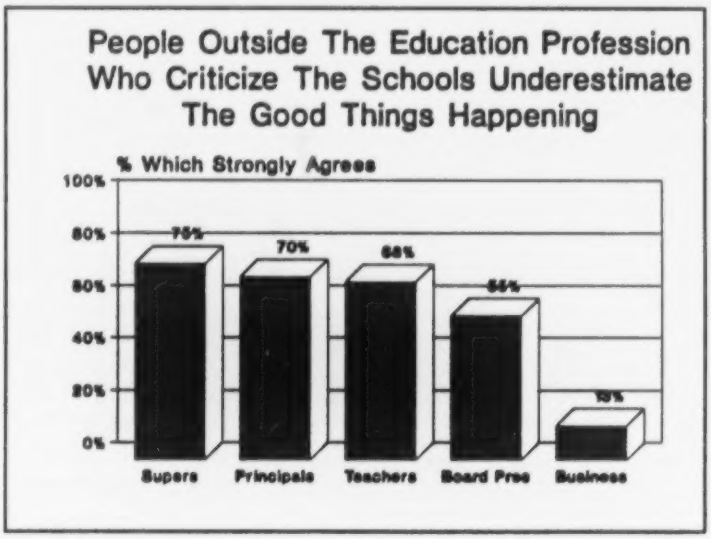
with annual salaries typically exceeding $100,000, they probably live in affluent communities whose public schools reflect a better tax base.

Observation

These fundamentally disparate evaluations may be borne of the different experiences the groups have with the schools. Only a minority of business executives (27 percent) have children under 18 years old. Their evaluations are probably based on reactions to the quality of their work force. In any case, the level of their dissatisfaction seems to reflect a profound rejection of the status quo. On the other hand, the optimism educators display toward their own communities' schools may reflect different criteria they use to evaluate school performance. They may be comparing their schools to "horror story" schools they hear about. They might also be reluctant to confront the uncomfortable notion that the nation's education problems may be found in their own backyard. Other studies often show that people think more highly of their own doctors or congressmen than they do of doctors or congressmen in general.

Finding

Overwhelming majorities of educators *strongly agreed* with the statement, "People outside the education profession who criticize the schools often underestimate the good things that are happening in schools today." But business executives were less convinced. Sixty-eight percent of teachers, 70 percent of principals and 75 percent of superintendents *strongly agreed;* by contrast, only 13 percent of executives strongly agreed with the statement (an additional 59 percent said they somewhat agreed with the statement).



Observation

The considerable majorities of educators who strongly agreed with the statement indicates they hold this opinion intensely. Educators may be feeling somewhat besieged, believing that the progress they achieve goes unappreciated by critics with little real experience in the schools.

In Sum

Support for changing the nation's education system may be predicated upon the belief that the system is off on the wrong track. If this is true, these findings indicate that a substantial barrier to reform may exist among the many educators who think the system is headed in the right direction. Furthermore, simply criticizing the performance of the schools may not be enough to bring educators to support reform, if they perceive that such criticism is coming from outsiders who tend to focus on bad news.

II. Defining Expectations and Evaluating the Performance of Our Nation's Public Schools

Finding

There was strong consensus among respondents — business executives, educators and board presidents — that no child should graduate from public schools without certain essentials. In each group surveyed, about 80 percent — and often over 90 percent — thought it was *essential* for the schools to teach students to:

- **believe in the fundamental values of our society (e.g. democracy)**
- **have sound work habits**
- **speak and write grammatically correct English**
- **work cooperatively with others**
- **have self-esteem and self-confidence**
- **have a basic understanding of science and math**
- **be flexible learners who can learn news skills and concepts**

Clearly, educators and business executives expect our nation's schools to accomplish a lot (of the 17 possible goals, seven were rated to be essential by 80 percent or more in each group). Many of the goals respondents deemed essential for schools to pursue go beyond "traditional" goals (such as verbal, writing, science and math skills) and concern students' personality development and social skills. (See Table 1.)

And although educators often complain that society expects schools to accomplish too much, they *add* two essential missions to the above list of expectations: understanding human sexuality and acquiring basic life skills (health, nutrition etc.). About 85 percent of educators (compared to 63 percent of business executives) said it was essential for schools to teach human sexuality. Almost 90 percent of educators (compared to 66 percent of business executives) thought it essential for students to acquire basic life skills in school.

It is also interesting to note some of the goals which were *not* seen as essential. Only about one-third of each group thought it was essential for schools to prepare students for college. Between 40 and 60 percent thought it was essential for schools to teach computer literacy, to understand the contributions made by other cultures, and to understand the Western cultural tradition. Fifteen percent or less thought it was essential for the schools to teach students a foreign language.

Table 1
Defining Expectations of Our Public Schools

"People sometimes expect the nation's public schools to teach students different things. Please indicate whether in your opinion each of the following should be considered **essential**, something no child should graduate without; **important** for some children but not for every single child; or **less important**, a much lower priority."

Essential for the nation's schools to teach:

	Teachers	Principals	Supers	School Brd Presidents	Business Execs
	%	%	%	%	%
To believe in the fundamental values of our society such as freedom, democracy and tolerance	92	99	98	92	94
To develop sound work habits such as self-discipline, timeliness, and dedication to work	95	96	97	89	95
To know how to work cooperatively with others	95	98	95	89	89
To have self-esteem and self-confidence	96	96	93	95	84
To write and speak grammatically correct English	87	85	87	91	97
To be flexible learners who can learn new skills and concepts	80	89	89	80	78
To have a basic understanding of science and math	79	83	84	85	82
To acquire basic life skills such as taking care of one's own health, nutrition, child care, etc.	88	90	87	77	66
To have a basic understanding of human sexuality, reproduction, birth control, and sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS	86	87	84	72	63

Finding

In a striking indication of the intensity of their dissatisfaction, majorities of executives thought the nation's schools were doing a *poor* job of achieving three of the seven essential goals listed above, and only a *fair* job on the four remaining essential goals (Table 2). An astounding 66 percent thought the schools were doing a poor job on teaching science and math, 62 percent thought the schools were doing a poor job of giving students sound work habits, and 56 percent thought they were doing a poor job teaching English. By comparison, only 9 percent of principals, 10 percent of superintendents, and 14 percent of teachers, said the schools were doing a poor job teaching English; only 9 percent of superintendents and 15 percent of teachers and principals said the schools were doing a poor job teaching science and math; and only 27 percent of superintendents, 29 percent of principals, and 36 percent of teachers said the schools were doing a poor job teaching sound work habits. In addition, a substantial minority of executives — 43 percent — thought the schools were doing a poor job of creating flexible learners (compared to only 16 percent or less of educators and school board presidents).

To be sure, educators and school board presidents are not enthusiastic about the performance of the nation's schools either — only small percentages rate their performance as good or excellent on any of the essential goals. For educators, the more common rating in evaluating school performance is "fair." In fact, of the 17 education goals respondents were asked to rate, only one — teaching students the Western cultural tradition — was rated as good or excellent by a majority of each group.

These findings are supported by a Harris survey of employers conducted in September of 1991: on 15 attributes, employers' average positive (good or excellent) rating of public school graduates was not better than 30 percent, while the average negative (fair or poor) rating was 66 percent.

Observation

To a certain extent, the groups stand on common ground. There is substantial consensus between executives, educators and school board presidents over what goals the schools should try to accomplish. But the magnitude of executives' discontent with the performance of the schools is profound. In observing the differences between executives and educators, it may be tempting to say, "executives are overreacting" or "educators are denying the problem." But the two groups may be evaluating school performance by different standards. Executives may be looking at their workforce requirements and the pressures of international competition. Educators may be thinking of the difficulties and limitations which constrain what they can accomplish.

Table 2
Evaluating the Job Done By The Nation's Public Schools

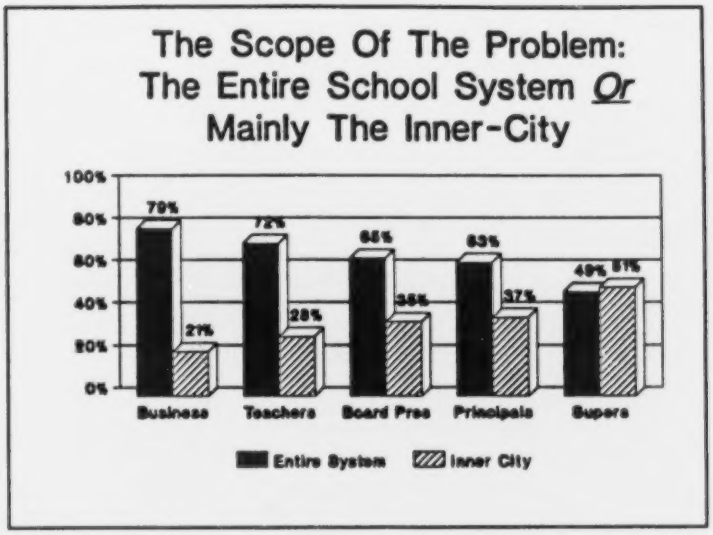
"We would like to know how good a job you feel the nation's public school system is doing in teaching high school graduates different things. For each area below, please tell us whether you feel the nation's public schools are doing an excellent, good, only fair or poor job."

Percent Fair/Poor Job on Essential Goals:

	Teachers		Principals		Supers		School Brd Presidents		Business Execs	
	Fair %	Poor %	Fair %	Poor %	Fair %	Poor %	Fair %	Poor %	Fair %	Poor %
To believe in the fundamental values of our society such as freedom, democracy and tolerance	38	9	36	9	35	6	49	11	62	13
To develop sound work habits such as self-discipline, timeliness, and dedication to work	48	36	51	29	49	27	43	40	36	62
To know how to work cooperatively with others	54	17	58	16	50	18	58	20	64	27
To have self-esteem and self-confidence	51	17	47	15	53	9	43	25	60	31
To write and speak grammatically correct English	57	14	50	9	51	10	58	23	40	56
To be flexible learners who can learn new skills and concepts	52	16	54	11	51	14	68	11	52	43
To have a basic understanding of science and math	47	15	53	15	48	9	43	29	26	66
To acquire basic life skills such as taking care of one's own health, nutrition, child care, etc.	45	11	39	12	40	8	46	14	54	24
To have a basic understanding of human sexuality, reproduction, birth control, and sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS	37	24	40	19	44	15	43	15	59	21

Finding

Business executives are highly likely to see the nation's school problems as pervasive rather than limited to the inner-city, while superintendents are divided. When asked, "Do you think our serious problems mainly involve inner city schools or do they involve our entire school system, including suburban schools?," fully 79 percent of business executives said our nation's serious problems involved the entire school system, and only 21 percent thought they mainly involved inner city schools. Superintendents were most likely to see the problem as isolated, with 51 percent pointing to inner city schools as the problem and 49 percent saying the entire school system was involved. Teachers shared with business executives the perception of general malaise (72 percent said the entire schools system suffered). Principals and school board presidents also saw the problem as national in scope, but to a significantly lesser extent (63 and 65 percent, respectively) than executives or teachers.



Observation

Defining the scope of the problem may be a crucial determinant of the extent of change one would support. If the nation's education troubles are confined to the inner-cities (as at least half of superintendents believe), this implies that schools serving poor and socially distressed communities are the problem. If the problems are pervasive (as majorities of executives and teachers indicate), then the schools are not meeting the needs of middle-class, "average" communities across the nation. Under the first perspective, limited, targeted change is in order; under the second, far-reaching, fundamental change is necessary. (In fact, educators who think that the nation's school problems are limited to the inner-cities are more likely to say that money is the solution. Educators who think the problems pervade the entire system say the schools should be reorganized before any more money is spent.)

III. Diagnosing the Problem

Finding

A. Why Don't Our Students Do As Well As Students From Other Industrialized Nations?
When asked why American students fare so poorly on standardized tests when compared to students from other industrialized democracies such as Germany and Japan, one explanation all groups emphasized was that "parents in other countries take more interest and responsibility for their children's education." Eighty-three percent of teachers, 74 percent of principals, 71 percent of school board presidents, 71 percent of superintendents, and 63 percent of business executives, say this is a very important explanation. (See Table 3.)

Educators — especially superintendents — tend to explain Americans' educational under-achievement as resulting from "trying to educate everyone while other countries channel weaker students into vocational programs," while business executives are hardly convinced by this explanation. Sixty-six percent of principals, 67 percent of teachers, and 74 percent of superintendents say this is a very important reason we are not doing as well as other nations. By contrast, only 19 percent of executives say this is a very important explanation.

Educators are also much more likely than business executives to say that higher spending on education by other nations explains the disparate achievement. While 45 percent of teachers and 43 percent of school board presidents say higher per capita spending is a very important reason students from other industrialized nations out-do American students, only 13 percent of executives think this is a very important reason.

Educators — more than business executives or school board presidents — identify the failure to provide self-discipline and respect for authority in the home as inhibiting the success of American students. Sixty-six percent of teachers, 58 percent of principals, and 56 percent of superintendents say this is a very important explanation. Only 44 percent of school board presidents and 43 percent of business executives say this is a very important explanation for the under-performance of U.S. students.

Similar proportions of teachers and school board presidents feel that "in other countries, the entire community is involved in education whereas that is seldom true in the U.S." (54 and 56 percent, respectively). Only 38 percent of business executives, 40 percent of superintendents, and 45 percent of principals think this is a very important explanation.

Interestingly, superintendents are more likely than any other group to identify the U.S. population's diversity as a cause of the disparity in performance (40 percent cited it as a very important explanation). Business executives were the least likely to rely on this explanation (only 16 percent said it was very important).

Only small proportions of any group resorted to explanations critical of other societies' education efforts: in each group, 19 percent or less said that other nations' students were terrorized into learning; only 25 percent or less said other countries turn out workers for industry while we concentrate on developing citizens; and only 26 percent or less said other countries stressed rote learning and memorization. Interestingly, only 26 percent or less cited America's social ills (such as poverty, drugs, and crime).

Generally, business executives downplay explanations for why American students fare so poorly on standardized tests. In eight of the 12 items offered as explanations, executives were the least likely of any of the groups surveyed to say they were very important.

Although substantial proportions in each group thought a very important explanation was that "in other countries, the entire community is involved in education whereas that is seldom true in the U.S.," this was not an intensely held view. A 54 percent majority of teachers and a 56 percent majority of school board presidents said community involvement was a very important explanation; only 38 to 45 percent of executives, superintendents, and principals held the same opinion.

Observation

While all groups thought parents' involvement in their children's education explained disparate achievement, there was only lukewarm support for the view that the *entire community's* involvement contributed to those differences. This could mean respondents thought that in general American communities were sufficiently involved in the schools or that respondents simply did not consider this to be a prime factor determining educational success. Either way, viewing the school as an institution isolated from community involvement seems to be pervasive.

Table 3
Why U.S. Students Are Not Doing Well Compared To Other Countries

"U.S. students do not do well on standardized tests compared to students in other industrialized democracies such as Germany and Japan. Which of the following do you feel are the most important explanations for this result?"

	Very Important				
	Teachers	Principals	Supers	School Brd Presidents	Bus. Execs
	%	%	%	%	%
Parents in other countries take more interest and responsibility for their children's education	83	74	71	71	63
In the U.S. we try to educate everyone while other countries channel weaker students into vocational programs	67	66	74	46	19
Other countries simply place a higher value on education than we do in the U.S.	65	52	49	57	65
U.S. schools are so busy trying to make up for things that kids don't get at home (such as self-discipline and respect for authority) that they don't have enough time to teach	66	58	56	44	43
In other countries, the entire community is involved in education whereas that is seldom true in the U.S.	54	45	40	56	38
Other countries spend more on education per capita	45	33	27	43	13
Other countries have a much smaller percentage of single parents and working mothers	37	32	40	21	22
Other countries have homogenous populations while the U.S. has a diverse population	26	32	40	28	16
Other countries do not have the problems we have with poverty, drugs, teenage pregnancy and crime	26	18	29	17	22
Other countries stress rote learning and memorization, while U.S. schools try to treat each child as an individual	26	24	17	22	6
Other countries use schools to turn out workers for industry while we concentrate on things that don't show up on standardized tests such as citizenship, tolerance and respect for diversity	25	18	23	10	8
Other countries pressure their students so much that students are terrorized into learning	19	16	12	8	2

Finding

B. What Are The Most Important Problems Facing the Public Schools?

There were substantial disagreements among the groups surveyed in assessing the importance of the problems public schools face. For example, the issue most troubling to each group of educators is that the schools are overburdened with societal problems (about 3 in 4 teachers, principals, and superintendents say this is very serious problem). Business executives are not as convinced, with only 49 percent saying schools are overburdened with societal problems. (See Table 4.)

The number one concern for business executives is that the schools have much needless waste in administration and bureaucracy. Sixty-six percent of executives said this is a very important problem (60 percent of teachers agreed as well). Not surprisingly, administrators did not share this diagnosis — only 20 percent of superintendents and 28 percent of principals said there was waste in administration and bureaucracy.

Interestingly, teachers were willing to criticize the quality of members of their profession. Fifty-seven percent of teachers — a percentage higher than any other group surveyed — said a very serious problem schools face is that teaching does not attract the best college graduates. Substantial proportions of other educators — 49 percent of superintendents and 43 percent of principals — said this was a very serious problem as well. This was also the third most important problem identified by executives, with 53 percent saying teaching does not attract the best college graduates.

Teachers are much more concerned about class overcrowding and low teacher salaries than their supervisors (principals and superintendents) while board presidents and business executives are hardly concerned. Sixty-five percent of teachers say class overcrowding is a very serious problem, compared with 32 percent of principals and about 20 percent of superintendents, school board presidents and business executives. And while a 52 percent majority of teachers say a very serious problem is low salaries for teachers, only small minorities — 35 percent of principals, 28 percent of superintendents, 14 percent of business executives and 8 percent of board presidents — agreed.

Business executives are much less concerned with revenue disparities across districts than educators. Only 28 percent of executives said inequalities in revenue from school district to school district was a very serious problem, while 56 percent of superintendents, 55 percent of board presidents, 47 percent of teachers and 45 percent of principals thought this was a very serious problem.

There was modest support for the notion that "the community as a whole is not involved in education." Although between 44 and 57 percent of each group felt this was a very serious problem, of the nine problems it was ranked third by business executives, school board presidents and principals, fourth by superintendents, and fifth by teachers.

Observation

Teachers see many critical problems confronting the nation's public schools: a majority of teachers indicated seven of the nine problems offered in the survey were very serious. At the other extreme, only one of the nine problems offered in the survey was seen as very serious by a majority of principals. A majority of business executives thought four of the nine items were very serious problems.

Table 4

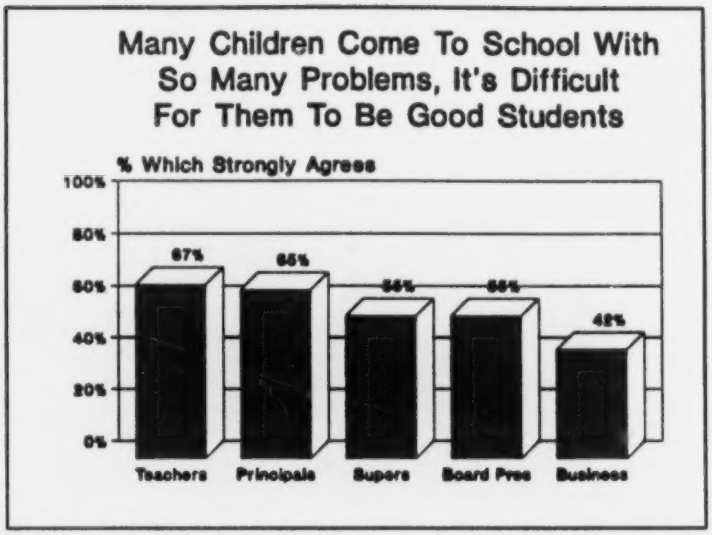
The Most Important Problems Facing the Public Schools

"Our nation's public schools face a variety of problems. Please indicate whether you feel each of the following is a very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious or not a problem at all:"

	Very Serious				
	Teachers	Principals	Supers	School Brd Presidents	Business Execs
	%	%	%	%	%
The schools are overburdened with societal problems	74	76	71	58	49
Teaching does not attract the best college graduates	57	43	49	39	53
The community as a whole is not involved in education	57	44	46	47	53
There are inequalities in revenue from school district to school district	47	45	56	55	28
There is much needless waste in administration, paperwork and bureaucracy	60	28	20	38	66
Parents of school children are not supportive of learning	58	35	38	33	44
There is far too much crime and drugs in the schools	45	31	31	46	54
Classes are overcrowded	65	32	20	20	22
Teacher's salaries are too low	52	35	28	8	14

Finding

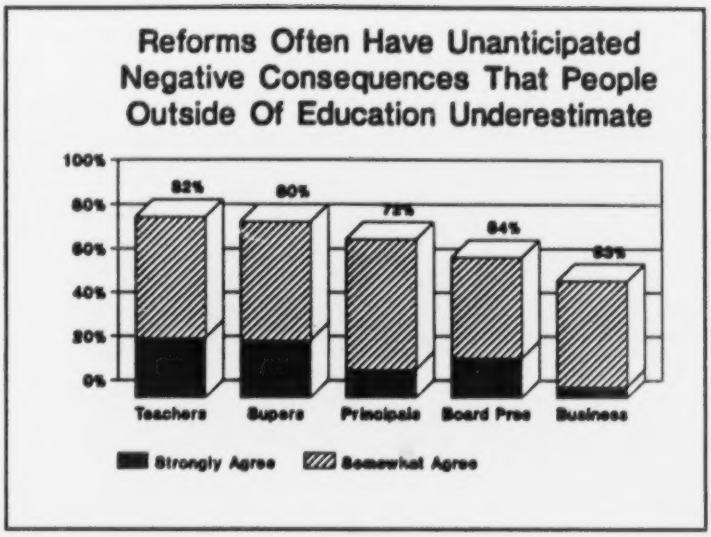
The closer respondents are to teaching's front line, the more disturbed they are by the problems today's students bring with them to school. Fully 67 percent of teachers, and a comparable 65 percent of principals, strongly agreed with the statement that many children come to school with so many problems that it's very difficult for them to be good students. By contrast, only 42 percent of executives strongly agreed with this statement. (55 percent of both superintendents and school board presidents strongly agreed).



IV. Attitudes Toward Reform

Finding

Business executives are least likely to fear the negative consequences of reform while teachers and superintendents are most likely to fear them. Only 53 percent of business executives agreed with the statement, "reforms often have unanticipated consequences that people outside of education underestimate," while 82 percent of teachers and 80 percent of superintendents agreed.

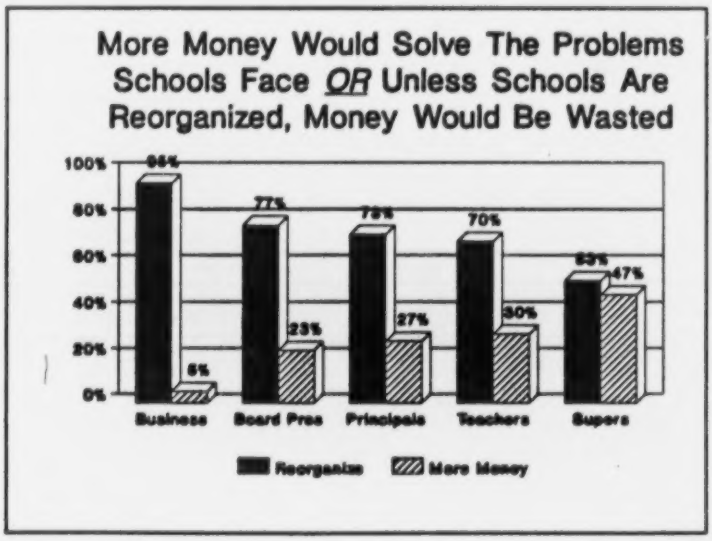


Observation

Educators may suspect that reforms will bring unintended harm. In a 1989 Metropolitan Life survey, 43 percent of teachers reported that education reforms in their schools had a positive impact on teachers, but 29 percent reported reforms had a negative impact (an additional 27 percent said they did not have much effect). The wariness with which they will approach proposed reforms indicates underlying concern and resistance which need to be acknowledged.

Finding

Survey respondents across all groups rejected spending more money on the nation's schools unless the schools were reorganized. Business executives are the strongest supporters of this view, with an astounding 95 percent saying that "unless our nation's public schools are substantially reorganized, spending more money would be a waste of valuable resources." By stark contrast, only 53 percent of superintendents agreed, while 47 percent said, "more money would solve most of the problems our nation's public schools face."

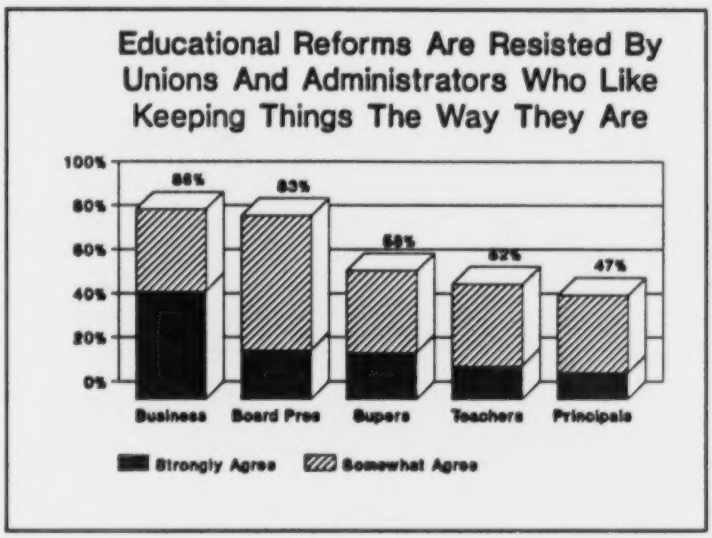


Observation

Except for superintendents, educators, business executives and school board presidents agree that before any more money is invested in the schools reorganization is necessary. The support for reorganization — despite the wariness of reform shown above — indicates substantial acceptance of the need for fundamental changes in our schools. It is also interesting to note that executives once again reject the idea that money is a root cause of the problems in America's public education system. (Recall that business executives were the least likely to think that inequalities in revenues across districts were a very important problem, and also the least likely to cite higher per capita spending by other countries as a very important explanation for the better performance of their students.)

Finding

Almost half (49 percent) of business executives *strongly agreed* with the statement that, "usually, educational reforms are resisted by unions and administrators who like keeping things the way they are" (an additional 37 percent somewhat agreed). Educators were much less likely to *strongly agree* with this view — only 15 to 22 percent of educators strongly agreed with the statement. Combining strongly agreed and somewhat agreed responses, however, small majorities or near majorities of educators agreed with the statement: 58 percent of superintendents, 52 percent of teachers, and 47 percent of principals strongly or somewhat agreed that reforms will be resisted by unions and administrators. Eighty-three percent of school board presidents agreed as well.

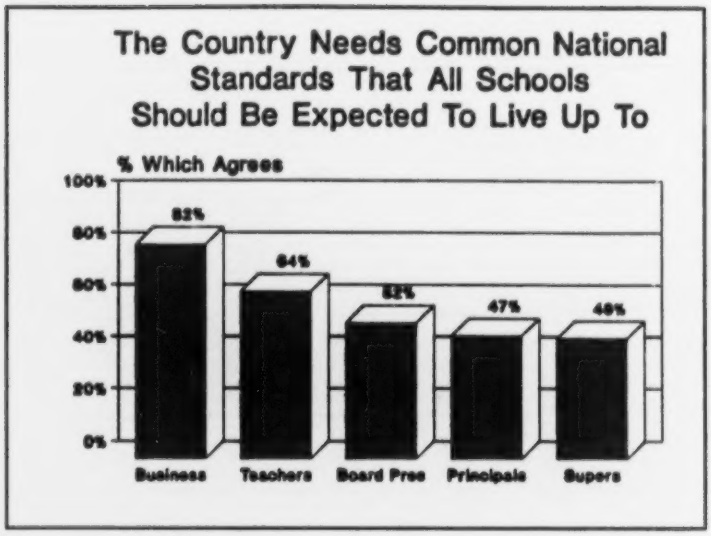


Observation

This level of agreement, equivocal though it might be, is surprising given the statement is explicitly critical of administrators (principals and superintendents) and unions (to which almost all teachers belong). That so many educators think there is institutional and professional resistance to reform in their ranks indicates that this resistance probably exists. Their willingness to acknowledge such resistance may be the first step in trying to overcome it.

Finding

Business executives are overwhelmingly in favor of national performance standards for all schools — fully 82 percent favor them, while only 18 percent are opposed. Interestingly, a strong majority of teachers join executives in supporting such standards (64 percent favor common standards, while 36 percent are opposed). Administrators are divided, with slight majorities of principals and superintendents (53 and 54 percent respectively) rejecting national standards for the schools. Only 52 percent of school board presidents support national standards.



Observation

Employers who were asked the same question in a Harris 1991 survey responded in a virtually identical manner as the business executives in this study, with 81 percent saying the country needed common national standards of performance. Significantly, the same study showed that 82 percent of the public and 87 percent of parents also thought the country needed common national standards.

V. Parental and Business Involvement in the Schools

Finding

Overall, business executives are much more interested than educators in expanding the role of parents and others in the community in the schools — especially in the allocation of school funds, selection of administrators and curriculum. Educators seem to be only minimally interested in increasing the role of parents and the community in substantive policy issues. While 56 percent of executives want parents and other members of the community to have more say over the allocation of school funds, only 10 percent of superintendents, 14 percent of principals, 20 percent of board presidents and 26 percent of teachers want to increase their say. Similarly, while 48 percent of business executives favor increasing the amount of say parents and others in the community have over the selection and hiring of administrators, only 11 percent of superintendents, 15 percent of principals, 17 percent of board presidents and 28 percent of teachers want to increase parental say in this area. And while 48 percent of executives favor increasing parental say over the curriculum, only 17 percent of teachers, 25 percent of superintendents, and 27 percent of principals are so inclined. Board presidents are more supportive here, with 38 percent favoring an increase in parental say over the curriculum. Finally, 40 percent of business executives would like to increase parental say over teacher and administrators' salaries, while 17 percent or less of educators are similarly inclined. (See Table 5.)

A 1989 Gallup survey shows that the public's position on parental involvement is closest to that of business executives. Fifty-nine percent of the public (compared to 56 percent of business executives in our survey) thought parents should have more say on the allocation of school funds; 53 percent (compared to 48 percent of business executives) thought they should have more say on curriculum; and 46 percent (compared to 48 percent of business executives) thought they should have more say on the selection and hiring of administrators.

Observation

While educators decry the insufficient role parents play in their children's education — anywhere from 71 to 83 percent of educators had said other nations' children do better because their parents take more responsibility for their education — they have deep misgivings about increasing the power parents have over *specific policy areas*. Most probably, educators would like parents to better prepare their children for school, volunteer, or help raise funds and leave actual school policies to the professionals. A 1987 Metropolitan Life survey of teachers supports this: only 18 percent of teachers said it would be "very valuable" to place parents on the school's curriculum committee; and only 26 percent said it would be "very valuable" to involve parents on a school management team. By contrast, 63 percent said it would be "very valuable" to involve parents in fundraising, and 68 percent thought they should volunteer to help out at the school. The wariness of educators may also reflect bad experiences they have had with special interests.

Table 5
Role of Parents and Members of Community

"Do you feel that parents of public school students and other members of the community should have more say, less say, or do they have about the right amount of say regarding the following areas in public schools?"

	More Say					
	Teachers	Principals	Supers	School Brd Presidents	Business Execs	*Public
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Allocation of school funds	26	14	10	20	56	59
Curriculum	17	27	25	38	48	53
Selection and hiring of administrators	28	15	11	17	48	46
Teacher and administrator salaries	17	10	10	13	40	39
Books and instructional materials	16	10	12	20	19	43
Selection and hiring of teachers	12	8	8	14	27	41
Books placed in the school libraries	13	10	9	23	13	38

*Data on the public are from the 1989 Gallup survey. The question wording varied slightly.

Finding

Overall, business executives were more critical of the performance of the nation's schools, saw the problems with schools as pervasive, and were markedly more supportive of reforms than educators. But when asked what kind of say corporate leaders should have "in defining the skills, knowledge, and competencies that all students should acquire in the public schools" only 29 percent of business executives wanted to have a major say (59 percent wanted some say and 12 percent little say). Even smaller percentages of superintendents, principals, school board presidents and teachers wanted corporate executives to have a major say in setting learning objectives for students. (See Table 6.)

Observation

Business executives are more willing than educators to give corporate leaders a major say in setting student standards, but *most* are clearly not eager to take major responsibility for this important aspect of education policy. Nevertheless, a majority of each group legitimizes business involvement in public schooling by saying that corporate leaders should have at least some say over student standards. It is the specifics of that involvement that are being defined across many communities today.

Table 6
Role of Corporate Leaders in Our Public Schools

"Do you believe that corporate leaders should have major say, some say or little say in defining the skills, knowledge and competencies that all students should acquire in the public schools?"

	Teachers	Principals	Supers	School Brd Presidents	Business Execs
	%	%	%	%	%
Major say	14	7	6	13	29
Some say	70	78	74	69	59
Little say	16	15	20	19	12

VI. Motivating Children to Learn

Finding

In choosing between two approaches to motivate children in school, educators are more likely than business executives to favor a "softer" approach — rewarding children when they make good effort — while business executives are more likely to favor a "harder" approach — setting common goals and measuring progress. Majorities of educators, school board presidents, and business executives favor rewarding good effort. But while 71 percent or more of school board presidents, principals, and teachers favor this approach, only 54 percent of business executives do so — 46 percent favor setting common goals and measuring progress as the best way of motivating children.

Table 7
How Do We Motivate Kids: Set Common Goals or Reward Good Effort

"People have different views on how to best motivate children in school. One approach suggests that setting common goals for all children and measuring the progress they've made is the best way to motivate them. Another approach suggests that recognizing and rewarding children when they make a good effort is the best way to motivate them. Which comes closer to your view:"

	Teachers	Principals	Supers	School Brd Presidents	Business Execs
	%	%	%	%	%
Setting common goals and measuring progress is the best way to motivate children	29	29	36	21	46
Recognizing and rewarding good effort is the best way to motivate children	71	71	64	79	54

Methodology

This report is based on 803 responses to mail surveys conducted between January 13 and March 31, 1992 by the Public Agenda Foundation and sponsored by the Kettering Foundation. The following groups were surveyed using systematic random sampling: in the public school system, K-12 teachers, principals, district school superintendents, and district school board presidents; in the private sector, corporate executives. The percentages reported throughout the study exclude "not sure" and missing responses.

Educators and school board presidents were randomly selected from alphabetized, updated lists of names provided by Market Data Retrieval of Shelton, Connecticut. The business executives were randomly drawn from two lists. Three hundred business executives interested in education issues were drawn from a list compiled in-house by Public Agenda. Five hundred additional executives were drawn from a 2,000 name list of CEOs and Directors of Human Resources of Fortune 500 Industrial and Fortune 500 Service companies. This second list was purchased from Research Projects Corporation in Woodbury, Connecticut. (An analysis comparing the responses of the two samples of business executives showed no significant differences between the two.)

Every "nth" name was drawn from the above lists to achieve the sample sizes requested (about 500 teachers, 500 school board presidents, 250 superintendents, 250 principals, and 800 business executives). The survey instrument was first mailed to prospective respondents on January 13. A reminder postcard was then mailed on February 5, and an additional, identical questionnaire was mailed to nonrespondents on February 21.

The surveys' response rates and margins of error are as follows:

	Sample Drawn	Responses Returned	Response Rate	Sampling Error[1]
			%	%
Superintendents	250	184	74	± 7
Principals	250	128	51	± 9
Teachers	491	242	49	± 6
Public Agenda business sample	300	70	23	± 8[2]
Fortune 500 sample	500	88	18	
School Board Presidents	500	66	13	± 12
Other	n/a	25	n/a	n/a
TOTAL:	2,291	803	35	

[1] The calculation of the surveys' margins of error is based on actual responses.

[2] Sampling error is for the two business samples combined.